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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT -
Lebanese Conflict - PM Blair in the US - Congo Elections
PARIS - Friday, July 28, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Lebanese Conflict - Rome Conference
Lebanese Conflict - The Role of Iran
Lebanese Conflict - The Role of the EU
PM Blair in the US
Congo Elections

(B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Accusations that American Tour de France 2006 winner Floyd Landis used testosterone dominate today's headlines and electronic media stories.

In French domestic news, the drop in unemployment - 1.2 percent in June - is widely reported and praised, although this drop has not been accompanied by the creation of new jobs.

Popular right-of-center Le Parisien carries a lengthy interview of Health Minister Xavier Bertrand on the heat wave that has claimed the lives of some 64 people in France out of the 80 in Europe.

The lead international story continues to be the conflict in Lebanon with an emphasis on Israel's difficulties in weakening Hizbullah. For right-of-center Le Figaro, Israel is: "Not getting anywhere" and for Le Monde the conflict is a "military failure."

"Tsahal is put to the test with the battle if Bint Jbeil" according to right-of-center Le Figaro. "The battle tends to prove that the Hizbullah militia has not lost any of its pugnacity or the tactical capabilities that characterized it in the 90's... Contrary to a number of other movements, Hizbullah has, over the course of the years, acquired invaluable tactical military experience... with a guerilla that is efficient, well-organized and methodical."

Catholic La Croix reports: "Hizbullah: A Difficult Target for the Israeli Army." The article cites Hassan Nasrallah as saying the "aggression of 1982" was the catalyst of Hizbullah's creation. Catholic La Croix further highlights the role of US-Israeli ties in the conflict: "If the Hebrew state, pushed by Washington, is interested in expanding the conflict via Iran and Syria, fundamentally the objective to wipe out Hizbullah remains the same."

Popular right-of-center Le Parisien reports that the Israeli army is tightening its "stranglehold" on Hizbullah in southern Lebanon. Although Israel sees its "strategy of small steps" as efficient in terms of lives and psychologically, Le Parisien intimates that the tactic may play better towards Hizbullah's propaganda.

Left-of-center Le Monde reports that the Israeli military is in the process of "defining a new strategy." Le Monde also carries a two-page account by Bernard Henri-Levy entitled: The War Seen From Israel."

State-run FR3 television aired a report about the kidnapped soldiers' families who came in France to ask for help. Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy met with them and later declared: "France continues to work to obtain their liberation." FR3-TV also mentioned that President Abbas' statement about "an imminent solution for Gilad Salit" was contradicted by Hamas, which denied any agreement. Catholic La Croix carries a profile of the mother of one kidnapped Israeli soldier, Malka Goldwasser. The article summarizes Goldwasser's meeting yesterday with FM Douste-Blazy in which she pleaded for the French government's help in finding her son. Goldwasser cited France's "privileged ties with Lebanon" as her motivation for seeking help from Paris.

In his right-of-center Le Figaro interview, Roed Larsen, Kofi Annan's envoy in Lebanon, says that he does not believe that a cease fire could be effective immediately. "A cease fire can only be effective if it has a political foundation... For the time being the two sides are too belligerent for this to be possible." Asked about the failure of the Rome Conference Roed-Larsen notes that it would have been naof to think that the crisis could be settled in a half day."

Left-of-center Le Monde's editorial notes that Fouad Siniora, the Lebanese Prime Minister, "must have felt very alone in Rome on Wednesday... he succeeded in 'moving' the participants... but not in being heard... Mr. Siniora incarnates the dignity and distress of Lebanon, but he is a voice in the wilderness." (See Part C) State-run FR2 television reported on the al-Jazeera broadcast of Bin Laden's right hand man, al-Zawahiri, calling for bomb attacks against Israel and its allies. Privately-owned Europe 1 radio quoted al-Zawahiri as saying: "We can't look at those rockets raining on Lebanon and Gaza, and remain inactive and submissive."

Le Figaro also reports on al Qaida's concerns as to Hizbullah's popularity and al-Zawahiri's video message in which he insists on the creation of an alliance of Muslim combatants that would transcend their sectarian differences. "In this was al- Qaida is placing itself in the footsteps of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood...Al-Qaida's distress at being relegated faced with Hizbullah's rising star is not necessarily good news. To win its

place back in the ranks of the 'true defenders of Islam' Ben Laden's organization could be tempted to raise the stakes through blood." The paper also reports President Bush's response to a recent al Qaeda video threatening Israel and its allies, saying he is "not surprised."

The editorial in Le Figaro by Pierre Rousselin: "Everyone is acting as though the controversy over Iran's nuclear program and the war between Hizbullah and Israel are dissociated. But everyone knows that in truth they are linked and will be more and more." (See Part C)

In the wake of Iraqi Prime Minister al Maliki's visit in Washington, left-of-center Le Monde calls al Maliki's speech before Congress "unconvincing" and notes that he was strongly criticized by Congress for "doublespeak: condemning terrorism but supporting Hizbullah."

A report in left-of-center Liberation points out that Ankara is threatening "an Israeli-style operation in Northern Iraq." One Turkish journalist is quoted: "How can public opinion agree on the US's acknowledgement that Israel has the right to defend itself, and not grant that same right to Turkey."

Catholic La Croix leads off with two pages about Congolese elections with the headline "The Democratic Republic of Congo Advances toward Democracy." The first free presidential and legislative elections since 1960 have "incalculable value," an article says. Despite the euphoria, there is also fear in the eastern part of the country that "the losers could refuse the ballot box's verdict." (See Part C)

The failure of the Doha Round continues to be a subject of commentary and analysis. Right-of-center Le Figaro carries an op-ed by Agriculture Minister Dominique Bussereau in which he analyses the failure of the negotiations. "The negotiations were too focalized on agriculture... which was detrimental to the talks as well as to agriculture in the end... The US for its part continues its usual tactics. It asks for things that are totally unrealistic without, in exchange, any willingness to reform its agricultural policies. This attitude is in large part responsible for blocking the talks." Left-of-center Liberation carries an interview of Pascal Lamy in which he speaks of the failure of the negotiations as due to "economic colonialism..."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Lebanese Conflict - Rome Conference

"Lebanon's Solitude"

The unsigned editorial in left-of-center Le Monde (07/28): "Lebanon today is caught in the trap of a war between Israel and Hizbullah. Israel is operating much more than a retaliation against the Shiite militia, it is determined to punish Lebanon. In Rome Fouad Siniora could see for himself that there is no international consensus to call for a cease fire... And yet only a cease fire could prevent Lebanon from destruction and stop the spiral of war. It is easy to start a war, it is harder to stop it and since Israel and Hizbullah are engaged in a military escalation, only the international community can be counted on to find a solution. In Rome the international community failed, but it must quickly get past allegiances to such and such country and remember its responsibility."

Lebanese Conflict - The Role of Iran

"Iran at the Heart of the Crisis"

The editorial by Pierre Rousselin in right-of-center Le Figaro (07/28): "To acknowledge that the Iranian nuclear crisis and the Lebanese conflict are related would be a first step to shedding light on the current situation.... That Hizbullah... maintains a certain degree of autonomy with regard to Teheran does nothing to alter Iran's determination to be recognized as a major player in the Muslim world and therefore in the conflict with Israel. This ambition transcends the nature of the regime and the refusal to take this into account, especially on the part of the US, explains the current stalemate over the Iranian nuclear issue... By reinforcing its influence on Hizbullah, Iran has filled the gap that was left in Lebanon following the withdrawal of Syria. Iran helped Hizbullah grow politically and as we can see today militarily... What is the international community waiting for to question Teheran...? The

policy of confrontation between Teheran and Washington has only served to strengthen the extremists. To pretend to ignore Iran is not the solution."

"Baghdad-Beirut: A Round Trip Ticket"

A column by economic right-of-center Les Echos' journalists notes that (07/28): "What the U.S. never expected, in spite of French appeals, is that the intervention in Iraq would offer a golden opportunity to Iran to enter history. When one takes this into account, recent events can be read like a children's book... The game started in Baghdad, today it is in Beirut. It is a safe bet that it will make its way back to Iraq where George Bush has just decided to reinforce the military contingent."

Lebanese Conflict - The Role of the EU

"The Union's Middle Eastern Dilemma"

In an analysis piece in left-of-center Le Monde, Thomas Ferenczi writes (07/28): "Of all of the crises that the international community has had to deal with, the conflict in the Middle East is without a doubt then one that has mobilized European diplomacy the most... But faced with this conflict the EU confronts a painful dilemma. If it does nothing it proves its ineffectiveness and if it tries to act it demonstrates its weaknesses."

PM Blair in the US

"The Bush-Blair Tandem"

Right-of-center Le Figaro's Guillemette Faure writes (07/28): "Just as was the case with Iraq, since the beginning of the conflict in Lebanon the British Prime Minister has adopted the role of the echo of the White House... The absence of an agreement at the Rome Conference proves that the Bush-Blair axis is still very much at the helm... Lacking results in Lebanon, Blair's visit to Washington will serve as a token of the British ally's loyalty following the departure of Silvio Berlusconi from the Italian government, of Jose Maria Aznar from the Spanish government and of Ariel Sharon in Israel. But Blair may get less attention than the visitors that will meet with the President after he leaves: the participants of the television show 'American Idol.'"

Congo Elections

"A Demand For Peace"

The editorial in Catholic La Croix by Francois Ernewein (07/28): "Europe and the international community as a whole deployed an impressive array of means to ensure that the elections are carried out properly but also that the post-election period is smooth. The world is committed to promoting the development and stability of this country but this mobilization will serve no purpose if the Congolese people themselves are not working for peace." STAPLETON